

124:46
ms

THE BAPTIST Record

JOURNAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION

DEC 08 2010

BANKRY *****CAR-RT LOT#C019
#0000 2011 12350
005 DTN
SOUTHERN BAPT HISTORICAL SOC 5994 P1
901 COMMERCE ST STE 401
NASHVILLE TN 37203-3620

ICE 1877
5, 2010
DL 134
No. 45

Church planting on upswing in Cuba

RICHMOND, Va. (BP) — When Osvier Acosta Ferrero, 72, and Ricardo Tadeo Soria Perez, 58, pedal down dirt roads on their bicycles, they're not out for exercise. They're praying for Cubans who need Christ.

These Baptist men sing hymns as they cycle for miles, traveling to rural communities to lead Bible studies. "If someday God sends us to another country, we'll go," Osvier says. "We have the joy of evangelization, always asking God for wisdom, a love for people and the joy of proclaiming His Word."

Their zeal is typical among Christians in Cuba who are seeing one of the most rapid rates of church growth in the world.

How vast is that growth? Cuban Baptist churches numbered 210 in 1960. Over the next 30 years, that total increased to just 238. In the 1990s, a church-planting movement began sweeping the island nation. Today, there aren't enough churches to hold all the believers.

The number of Cuban Baptist traditional churches, missions, and house churches exceeds 6,200. Some 5,600 of these congregations worship in houses, garages, yards, or on rooftops.

This remarkable growth has created a huge need for more church leaders. To help meet that need, a team of International Mission Board (IMB) missionaries travels periodically to the island to help Cuban Baptists train leaders. Gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and Cooperative Program support this ministry.

"This is God's time for Cuba," one of the IMB missionaries says. "Pray God will raise up church leaders for the harvest. Pray a sufficient number of leaders will be trained."

God already is answering in remarkable ways. One is through music and the



BLOOMING CHURCH — Christians in Cuba are seeing one of the most rapid rates of church growth in the world. So many people are coming to Christ in Cuba that there aren't enough churches to hold all the believers. Here, Cuban Baptist worshippers pack into a one-car garage in Havana. (BP photo)

training of worship leaders. An estimated one of every five people in Cuba is involved in music in some way.

When the Holy Spirit sparked the church-planting movement in Cuba, many musicians began accepting Christ. In response, Cuban Baptists and IMB missionaries developed several schools to teach musicians to grow as disciples and to use their skills in leading worship. Today, there are more than 50 of these schools. They train about 1,000 Cuban Baptists each year. Some of these musicians even organize music mission trips across Cuba.

The schools also spurred a renewal of corporate worship, which God is using to draw more people to Christ. A special addition to that worship is the first Cuban Baptist hymnal, *Alabanza Cubana*, published in 2005 with the help of several IMB missionaries.

God also is at work among professional musicians. Many are committing their lives to Christ and, in turn, finding creative ways to share their faith with colleagues.

"It's incredible what God is doing," says an IMB missionary working with musicians. "There's no telling where He's going to go with all of this."

Thai prison ministry finds unique ways to reach, teach

BANGKOK, Thailand (BP) — It's Sunday morning and Arti, 29, smiles as he teaches Bible verses to a class full of children at the Church of Blessing in Bangkok, Thailand. Slight in build and neatly dressed, he doesn't look like a man who spent five years in prison for a drug conviction.

Arti shares a past with many of the individuals attending this church today. Like him, most here are former prisoners who served time for drug offenses or worse. They also are now followers of Jesus Christ.

Arti found his way to Christ through the House of Blessing, a halfway house that shares the same grounds with the Church of Blessing. It was a journey that began within prison walls when a Christian aunt brought him a Bible and devotional materials.

"The reason that I came and stayed here was that I had no place to live [after my release]," Arti recalls, "and my auntie said that this is a good place for me to start. My first time here I never believed that this place could help me and give me the hope."

The halfway house and church are part of the Christian Prison Ministry

Foundation of Thailand. Soonthorn Soonthornatarawong, director of the foundation, started both to meet the needs of former prisoners.

Because of their past, former prisoners often become outcasts in Thai society and are rejected even by their families.

Both the halfway house and church grew out of a prison ministry begun in 1971 by International Mission Board missionary Jack Martin. In the early 1980s Soonthorn joined Martin in the work and eventually assumed leadership of the ministry when Martin and his wife Gladys retired in 1999.

Like others who live at the halfway house, Arti's spiritual life took root and flourished in the Christian environment.

"While I was here I was learning many, many Scriptures and many people shared God with me," Arti says. "I studied the Bible with the group here until I was sure and believed that God loved me and Jesus died for me. That made me decide to walk with Christ and give glory to Him in my life."

ARE WE THERE YET?

2010 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering

National Goal: \$175 Million

Week of Prayer for International Missions and International Mission Study November 20 - December 5

Our Church Goal

imb

imb.org/offering



LISTENING, LEARNING — The Church of Blessing is one outgrowth of the Christian Prison Ministry Foundation in Bangkok, Thailand. This children's Sunday School class is full of smiling faces and enthusiastic singing voices, as Arti, a former prisoner and now first-year seminary student, leads them in a Bible song. (BP photo)

Walls of hardness falling in Czech Republic

PRAGUE, Czech Republic (BP) — Never underestimate the difference one person can make.

Mark and Vesta Sauter came to the Czech Republic to start churches among the nation's deaf, but the Indiana- and Texas-born missionaries weren't having much success until God brought them an unlikely volunteer — 90-year-old Lillian Beard.

Beard, from Fort Worth, Texas, was a pioneer for deaf work among Southern Baptists and a lifelong mentor to Vesta. The women shared a common bond: As hearing children of deaf parents, both learned to sign as their first language.

Serving through the International Mission Board, the Sauters spent three years telling deaf Czechs about Jesus. They'd made deaf friends, dined in deaf homes, spoken at deaf gatherings, even taught in deaf schools. Despite their efforts, they hadn't seen a single deaf person come to Christ, and the stakes were too high to fail.

Nearly 50,000 deaf live in the Czech Republic. When the Sauters first arrived in 1996, there were no deaf churches and few, if any, deaf Christians. Worse, the country's hearing congregations weren't doing much to change that.

"The church can be one of the most oppressive and disheartening experiences for deaf people," Vesta says. "None of them has an open door... Even if a deaf person said, 'I'm going to get into that church, I'm going to find a way,'... they would be ostracized or sidelined. They would only be objects of somebody's ministry."

Unlikely volunteer

The Sauters shared their struggles with Beard, who told them she was no longer content to simply pray for their ministry. She wanted to come help. Beard's friends thought the 90-year-old was crazy.

"I can die there just as easily as I can here," she told them. And if that happened, "They can put me in a box and send me home... Serving Him is all I want to do."

Though she loved Beard dearly, Vesta wasn't keen on the idea. "I was very apprehensive; she's 90, in a wheelchair and doesn't know Czech sign language. I thought, 'What am I going to do with her?'" Vesta says.

Beard was determined. Reluctantly agreeing to the visit, the Sauters used their connections to arrange a luncheon at the Prague deaf club where Beard would be a guest speaker. What they didn't know was how deeply Beard's story would touch Anna Smolkova, a particularly hardhearted deaf Czech.



VISION FOR THE DEAF — Vesta Sauter (right) talks with Anna Smolkova and other members of her deaf church-planting team. Sauter and her husband Mark envision deaf churches flourishing among all of the world's people groups. (BP photo)

Smolkova is the matriarch of a large deaf family (more than 60 members) that is well-connected within the country's deaf circles. Vesta knew Smolkova's conversion could catalyze the efforts to plant the Czech Republic's first deaf church, but Smolkova had been very resistant — even hostile — to the Gospel.

"I want to make [it] very clear to you that I don't want anyone in my family to know about Jesus or God," Vesta recalls Smolkova warning her.

However, Smolkova had never met Lillian Beard. The Prague deaf club was packed the day she spoke because people were so intrigued that a 90-year-old American would cross the Atlantic just to talk to them. The crowd demanded to see Beard's passport as proof of her age, passing it around the room for all to see.

Beard shared her life story about a hearing person immersed in a deaf world. Orphaned and then adopted by deaf parents, she became a skilled interpreter for the deaf, helping found the Texas Society of the Deaf, the National Registry of Interpreters, and the Southern Baptist Conference of the Deaf.

Beard's accomplishments weren't what impressed Smolkova. "I didn't believe this woman was 90... I was amazed at how beautiful she was, how she radiated. Something touched me inside about her," Smolkova says.

"I had a very hard heart, an atheist. I really didn't know or believe anything about God... [The Gospel] was so foreign,

so new, like nothing I'd ever heard about... Something began knocking at my heart... and wouldn't release me."

Taken with Beard's testimony, Smolkova peppered her with questions after the luncheon, kneeling at Beard's wheelchair so their eyes met.

"What is it? Why are you so beautiful? Why do you radiate?" Smolkova remembers asking, and she signed to me, "It's the love of Jesus... That struck a chord in my heart and a conviction, and I couldn't run from it."

With Vesta's guidance, Smolkova asked Christ into her life that day. The change was dramatic.

Alcohol to baptism

"I was a gossip, an alcoholic. I loved to get drunk," Smolkova says. "I can remember the first sip I took after Jesus came [into my life] and it was just horrible... I started looking back on my life, how I acted and how I talked and how I behaved, and I was so grateful... to no longer have those things control my life."

Family and friends noticed Smolkova's change as well. She couldn't keep it to herself. Working with the Sauters, she

hatched a plan to witness to her entire extended family, simultaneously, by being baptized at her 50th birthday party.

"There's one skylight in the auditorium of this Czech Baptist church that has stained glass in it," remembers Vesta's husband Mark, who baptized Smolkova. "Somehow, at that moment in time, the sun broke through and, just like Star Trek, this cylinder of light came down and surrounded her... Everybody saw it, and she looked at us... like 'Does that always happen?'"

Smolkova became increasingly enthusiastic as Vesta disciplined her about sharing her faith with other deaf Czechs. They met almost daily so Smolkova could learn new Bible stories to use for evangelism, making Scripture "come alive" through her hands.

"The deaf people that I encounter... are like me. They have a very, very difficult time reading the Bible. The written word is not their first language," Smolkova explains.

"When they see the story on their hands, then in their heart, there comes conviction and in their minds comes understanding."

Looking back

10 years ago

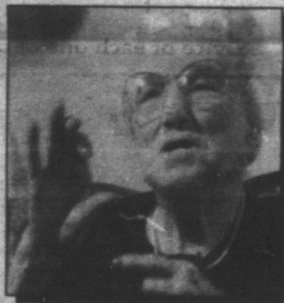
First Church, Oxford, breaks ground on a \$5.3 million education addition to its campus just off the historic town square.

20 years ago

The merger of Benton and Tippah Associations in north Mississippi becomes a reality when the two associations vote to become one. Bill McCreary, who will serve as associational director of the new group, call the merger "a positive step forward for the work of our Lord."

50 years ago

A capacity crowd of approximately 4,000 mostly young people is expected for the ninth annual Youth Night service of the Mississippi Baptist Convention on Nov. 25. Howard E. Butt, Jr., well-known layman and youth speaker, Corpus Christi, Tex., will be the featured speaker.



Beard



MISSISSIPPI
BAPTISTS

THE SECOND FRONT PAGE

PUBLISHED SINCE 1877

NOVEMBER 25, 2010

VOL. 134

No. 45



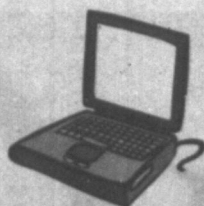
YOU CAN RESPOND
RIGHT NOW!

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.



EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

EDITOR
William H. Perkins Jr.
wperkins@mbcb.org

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Tony Martin
tmartin@mbcb.org

LAYOUT/DESIGN
Benjamin Ivey
bivey@mbcb.org

ADVERTISING
Emily Jones
ejones@mbcb.org

CIRCULATION MANAGER
Brenda Quattlebaum
bquattlebaum@mbcb.org

EDITOR EMERITUS
Don McGregor

Baptist Record Advisory Committee:
Archibald Herrin, Columbia
Chris Webb, Jackson
Sharon Neff, Cleveland
John Price, Charleston
Dwayne Parker, Flora
Paul Sims, Pontotoc

Postmaster:
Send changes of address to: The
BAPTIST RECORD, P.O. Box 530,
Jackson, MS 39205-0530.

Send news, communication, and
address changes to: The Editor,
BAPTIST RECORD, P.O. Box 530,
Jackson, MS 39205-0530.

Tel: (601) 968-3800
Fax: (601) 292-3330
E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org

VOLUME 134 • NUMBER 45
(ISSN-0005-5778)

Published weekly except weeks of July 4
and Christmas by the Mississippi Baptist
Convention Board, 515 Mississippi Street,
Jackson, MS 39201. Subscription \$10.35 per
year payable in advance. Economy plans
available for cooperating Mississippi churches.
Periodicals postage paid at Jackson, MS.
Member, Association of State Baptist Papers.
Deadlines: News items — one calendar
week prior to requested publication date.
Advertising — two calendar weeks prior to
requested publication date. All submissions
are subject to editing.

The Heavenly Book Visitor

Charlotte Diggs Moon was born into the rarified Virginia aristocracy at her family's Albermarle County estate on December 17, 1840. She died a pauper's death 72 years later, thousands of miles from home and a lifetime away from her privileged early life.

Those are the cold, hard textbook facts. We all have a beginning and an end on this earth, but it's what we do in between that counts for eternity. "Lottie," as she came to be known, understood that fact.

In 1858, God moved in Lottie's life and she accepted Christ as Lord while attending the First Baptist Church in Charlottesville, Va. God moved again in her life in 1873, when she requested and against all odds received her missionary appointment from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board (now the International Mission Board). She was one of the first single women chosen for Southern Baptist missionary service.

Lottie set sail for China in September of that year and by December had settled in the northern town of Tengchow, where she lived for the next 40 years. She devoted herself to evangelistic work among the women and children of the surrounding area, telling all who would listen about the "true God," giving away books, and teaching those who couldn't read the books.

Lottie was rejected many times and earned the nickname of "Devil Old Woman," but her persistence never flagged. She wrote to friends in the United States,

I never would have told you I was made for this. I was meant to be a rodeo queen.

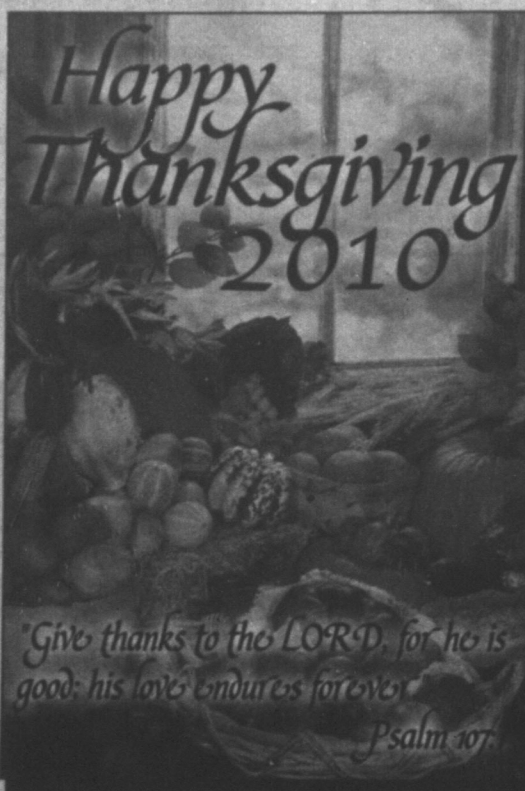
I have a hot-pink lasso to prove it, not to mention an encyclopedic brain on horse-isms, thanks to The Black Stallion books and Horse Illustrated magazine. For years I went to bed at night with barrel-racing dreams.

Thank goodness reading all those horse stories made me love words as much as horses. The dreams eventually turned to being a writer or editor, maybe for a magazine. Maybe of Horse Illustrated — but absolutely, positively, not as a missionary.

To me, missionaries had one definition — people who went to the other side of the world to evangelize on a grand scale, probably in front of large numbers of people. That was not me.

I'm a story lover, not a Billy Graham. I want the excuse of a newspaper interview to be able to meet people one-on-one and ask them to tell me their stories. Then I want to tell those stories to other people.

I majored in journalism. I got a good job offer and felt my heart was content to stay indefinitely at my home state's major daily newspaper. It seemed an endless avenue of



"How I wish I had a thousand lives that I might give them to the women of China!"

Lottie's love for the Bible and for the Chinese people became legendary in the villages around Tengchow, and opposition to her work eventually faded. Then one day as she moved among the people with her Bible, she heard someone refer to her as the "Heavenly Book Visitor." The name quickly stuck with villagers.

In Lottie's day China suffered almost constant internal turmoil, with outside powers also attempting to exert their influence. Still, Lottie fervently continued her work through the chaos.

The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 ignited famine that soon spread through the Chinese countryside and foreshadowed fateful events to come in Lottie's life. Desperate to help the starving people around whom God has called her to build her life, Lottie began to withdraw her personal life savings and use the money to feed the hungry.

When that money ran out, she used virtually all her meager salary to buy food for others — often failing to retain enough food for herself. She collapsed five days before her seventy-second birthday, her health broken and her 4'11" frame nearly decimated. Years of personal sacrifice had taken its toll.

Lottie died of starvation on Christmas Eve, 1912, in the harbor of Kobe, Japan, aboard a ship that was taking her home to America. The world took little note of her life and death, but she changed Southern Baptists and China forever.

Many sad events have transpired in Lottie's China since she came home — some of which involved Southern Baptists — but God will yet prevail in that nation of soft-spoken, humble people.

A marble gravestone in a small Virginia cemetery carries Lottie's name, as does the greatest international missions offering in all of Christendom. Also on that gravestone is the simple phrase, "Faithful unto death."

God permit that those words, bought at so great a price by the Heavenly Book Visitor, should also mark the Christian service of each one of us.

GUEST OPINION:

Being everything He meant for me to be

By Ava Thomas

great stories, with a spread of good local churches and great ministries nearby to boot.

I was set, but He found me anyway. It wasn't long before I started realizing maybe I wasn't so set after all. Happy, yes. Content, no. Maybe He had in mind trimming away the stories on hospital picket lines, Paso Fino horses, and mosquito conventions, and instead asking of me a different kind of story — the kind that had purpose.

Soon I was working at a Southern Baptist publication, hearing and relaying the stories of how God was advancing the Gospel around the world: Well drilling. Goat herding. Coffee making. Football coaching. Bookkeeping.

All these were stories of how He was actively pursuing the lost through His work-

ers on the other side of the world in dark places, places where I had never considered visiting much less living.

All of those job descriptions were filled by missionaries — no Billy Graham in the list, just normal people doing normal work. I knew He had placed me at my desk at the publication where I was, but my own stories were getting to me. There was something else, something next that He was asking.

It was to move myself, to go be a missionary — the journalist kind, not the Billy Graham kind — so I did.

I won't say it was easy. I was happy where I was, seasoned at my job after a number of years, one year of graduate studies under my belt, with thoughts of maybe teaching college one day. I had an amazing church

and amazing friends. It didn't seem logical, but logic didn't cover the gnawing I felt inside.

A year later, I fell on my face before Him and told Him that He could have it all. I'd even try to be Billy Graham if He wanted. I meant it. He just asked me to be who I was, to tell His stories and to love people and their stories — and to tell them His story in the process.

Now I live overseas, working as a writer for Southern Baptist missions, seeing firsthand how He's at work, and telling the stories to Baptists back in the States about God's story of salvation in the process.

That way, Baptists can know how the darkness is being pushed back by the money they give through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and the Cooperative Program and by the people they send and the prayers they pray. That way, they can see the faces and hear the voices of real people, redeemed people who have met Christ.

That way, hopefully they will see, and give, and go.

Thomas' location and photo have been omitted for security reasons. Her commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press.

Devastating loss doesn't stop missionary for long

RICHMOND, Va. (BP) — Her pain, grief, and sadness from more than a decade ago lie just below the surface. Gloria Sloan remembers the spiritual darkness that enveloped her on that heartbreaking day.

"I remember feeling that sense of something evil around me," the International Mission Board worker said, "a very strong sense of evil for a moment."

Currently on stateside assignment in Houston, Sloan recently discussed the tragic loss of her husband Gary, 37, and 11-year-old daughter Carla on June 18, 1999. They drowned while swimming along the Pacific coast of Mexico.

Two summer mission volunteers from the U.S. — Joy Murphy and John Weems — also died while trying to rescue Carla.

The Sloans and their four children had moved to Mexico as missionaries six months earlier. Gloria Sloan, 44, a native of El Salvador, remembers shaking her finger toward the ocean telling Satan, "You will not get any glory from what has happened here today."

Though life as she knew it changed that day, Sloan refused to give up God's call on her life to be a missionary. "My calling did not end on that beach the day when Carla and Gary died," she said in a 2001 interview. "Gary completed what it was that God had called him to do. I have not

"It is in those moments of deep darkness where we recognize under whose light we abide," she said recently.

After taking six months off to grieve with relatives in Texas, Sloan decided to return to Mexico. She and her children — Alyssia, Rissa, and Alan — moved to the Toluca Valley about 400 miles north of Chiapas, where she and her family had served before the tragedy.

She continued her work as a church planter. After six years in Toluca, Sloan had trained local believers to spread the Gospel, lead discipleship training, baptize new Christians, and sustain the work. In September 2005 she moved her family to Mexico City to continue planting churches.

Before the move, Margarito, a local pastor in Toluca, told Sloan something she will never forget. "He told me, 'Please forgive me for what I'm about to tell you. If your husband would not have died, my family would not have heard of the Gospel.'"

At first Sloan didn't know how to respond. "How dare you say that?" she remembered thinking. "If God would have given me a choice, I probably would have chosen my family over his. Then I thought what an awesome, loving, and sovereign God we have that when I was standing on that beach losing my loved ones, God was thinking about Margarito's family."

After moving to Mexico City, Sloan again saw lives transformed by Christ. Local believers have taken ownership of the ministry and continue the work. It's that success that leads Sloan to believe her work there is finished.

Following her assignment in the States, Sloan will return to Mexico City next summer to pack up her home and transfer to Honduras. This time it will just be her and her son Alan, who is 15.

"The time is right," she said, noting her daughter Alyssia, 21, is attending Dallas Baptist University. Her other daughter Rissa, 17, will graduate high school in 2011 and attend college that fall.

Sloan is looking forward to her next place of service. In her new position, she will help mobilize missionary work in Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. For now, she is thankful that God has her in Texas so Alan and Rissa can attend the same high school Gary attended.

Alan also plays on the football team his father once played on and coached.



FAMILY TIES — For Gloria Sloan, being a single mother of three children — Alyssia, 12, Rissa, 8, and Alan, 6, at the time of this photo — has come with its share of challenges and proud moments. Today Alyssia, now 21, attends Dallas Baptist University. Rissa, 17, and her brother Alan, 15, both attend the same high school in Texas their father once attended. (BP photo)

Before Sloan begins the next chapter of her life in a new place, she returned to Playa Linda in 2009, the beach in Mexico where her husband and daughter drowned.

"I did a lot of crying on that trip," she said, "but it was good crying. It was a time of victory." It was a time of standing on that beach, counting blessings... counting what God has done in the lives of people

in my life and how far He has brought us," she said, "and you know, there is a church now there near that place."

Sloan remains determined that God will be pleased with the future chapters of her life. "I do not want the enemy to take glory for anything that happened on that day. That is something that motivates me to go on," she said, "as long as God gives me the grace."

He waited 20 years to understand God, now he's spreading Gospel

RICHMOND, Va. (BP) — Ray Aker (not his real name) couldn't believe his ears. The Oklahoma native had spent the past two years sharing Jesus in a rural area of China without seeing a single salvation, until now.

God had brought Aker and a small team of Southern Baptist volunteers to a man named Solomon (not his real name) who lived with his family in a dirt-floored shack in an isolated mountain village. Aker told the Gospel story and Solomon immediately believed.

It was what he said afterward that Aker can't forget. "Twenty years ago, I understood in my heart that there was one God above all," Solomon told Aker, "but I didn't know anything about Him so I prayed every day that He would send somebody to tell me who He was. God answered my prayer today when He sent you to me."

"That was probably the single most powerful experience that I've ever been a part of in ministry here," Aker says. "I didn't do anything special... God ordained that moment in time."

Immediately Solomon began telling others about the one, true God and quickly led six villagers to faith, including his wife and two daughters. The local witchdoctor took notice.

If Solomon didn't stop sharing, the witchdoctor threatened publicly, Solomon would be cursed and die in three days. Solomon refused to be silent, and on day four when villagers saw that he was still alive, they wanted to know why.

Aker says Solomon told the whole village about Jesus. In one day 80 people gave their lives to Him. "These people live in daily fear of evil spirits," Aker explains.

"Everything they do — which direction their house faces, when they get married, what they eat — it's all based on trying to appease these evil spirits. The fact that Solomon didn't die rocked their worldview."

Four years later, God has used Solomon's influence to bring more than 400 people to faith across three neighboring villages. Three house churches have been planted. Aker says the Good News is now spreading to a fourth village.

"We went from zero [believers]... to 147 in about five months," Aker says. "I will never make it to every single village of our people group. It's impossible... That's why we have to train and raise up believers... to reach the rest."

The villagers aren't the only ones whose faith has grown as a result of Solomon's work. Aker admits, "If you had asked me back then... did I think God could do these things, I'd say, 'Yeah, I think He could but I haven't seen it.' I believe in my head God can do it. Did I believe in my heart that He would do it? Back then, if I was being honest, I'd have to say no."

"God had been preparing Solomon for 20 years... I'm just thankful God allowed me to be a small part of it."



REACHING UNBELIEVERS — Flaming torches signal the end of a local festival celebrated by a minority people in China who are predominantly animistic in their beliefs. God is using Southern Baptists to introduce the Gospel to receptive individuals who then influence their villages to receive Christ. (BP photo)

BIBLIOCIPHER

By Charles Marx, 1932 - 2004
© 2005

NRTD NRT HLTOPWTD-
NO GDW HLPDSTO
OEIARN NE YPDW ESS-
GOPED GAGPDON
WGDPTB SEDSTLDPDA
NRT VPDWEC; QIN
NRTX SEIBW YPDW DEDT
ESSGOPED DEL YGIBN;
YELGOCISR GO RT ZGO
YGPNNRYIB, DTPNRTL
ZGO NRTLTX GDX TLLEL EL
YGIBN YEIDW PD RPC.
WGDPTB OPN: YEIL

Clue: H = P

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Nahum One: Seven

A BUCKET LIST OF BLESSINGS

I never saw the movie, *The Bucket List*, though I read so much about it and saw clips from it in various places that I feel like I saw it. I know the storyline is about a couple of guys who were looking down the road at the end of life and were passionate about doing some things before they checked out, and so the adventure unfolds as they set out on their journey. It is an interesting concept and numerous folks have told me that it is a moving film. As we approach the Thanksgiving Season, I got to thinking about things for which I am so deeply grateful and I began to contemplate a Bucket List of Blessings. I have a few weird and warped things that I thought about wanting to do before the end of life, but the reality is that the Lord has blessed me in so many ways and allowed me to do things, go places, be with people, and accomplish more than I could have ever imagined. I am blessed and I am grateful.

If I had a bucket filled with a list of the top blessings that I could just pull out one at a time, any one of them could be number one but for sure, I would place up near the top the joys and the blessings that have been mine to share life's journey with family, friends, and wonderful co-workers. I have been blessed to live with and around great and gifted people and to be associated with some that were not so gifted but were even more amazing. Only God Himself could have provided me with a mate, children and their spouses, and their children who would bless and encourage my life the way they have.

Beyond them, I have been encircled by friends, pastors, church members, and lay people young and old, who have served and not only encouraged me but have challenged



Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

and enriched my life. Throughout my adult life as I have sought to follow the Lord and serve Him, the Lord has blessed me to serve alongside people one after another by the dozens. Today, I have the privilege of serving Mississippi Baptists. I am constantly overwhelmed by the team of people who serve you and bless me. My bucket would be filled with blessings if I stopped there, but it doesn't.

A second blessing pulled from the bucket would be how grateful I am that no hurricane has come on shore in Mississippi in over five years. Our last visit was enough for us to deal with for 25 years as Ms. Katrina arrived in August 2005. I certainly am not in a position to tell God how to manage and direct hurricanes, and I absolutely do not want anyone anywhere to have to deal with the winds, waters, and the disruptions of a hurricane, but I am so blessed that we have not had one of any category to come on our coast.

When Katrina blew in and brought havoc to the entire southeastern coastline from New Orleans and across Mississippi, a part of my day everyday was dealing with hurt, loss, brokenness, rebuilding, and the renewal of people's lives and our churches across the coast. Having lived on the coast and having loved both the people and the places and often seeing what was and would never be again, I wondered how in the world we could help day after day. It has been personally heartbreaking and inspirational.

It has been inspirational in that I have watched as our people on the coast, and especially our saints on the coast, found new, creative, innovative, and determined ways to go on serving the Lord. They were and continue to be a blessing to me and to anyone who has any awareness of what they have been through and what they are doing. If a storm had come, we would have done everything humanly possible to respond once

again, but I am so thankful and blessed of God that we have not had another storm.

Reaching into the bucket and taking out another blessing, I reflect on God's goodness toward us. I think about the thousands of souls that have been saved in our churches and through the ministries provided by Mississippi Baptists to touch lives. Over the past few years, more than 200 children have come to know Christ through the ministry of the Baptist Children's Village. On our college campuses, we have seen hundreds who have come to know Christ. In our churches, though baptisms are not where we want them to be, thousands have come to know Jesus. In a time of unprecedented economic downturn and in an environment where people are looking for hope that is not hope and change that does not change, Jesus Christ remains the powerful, loving, and ever able Savior who can change a heart, restore a broken life, and bring joy where all gladness has been stripped.

Recently, I was preaching in one of our churches and after the service a young woman with a radiant smile came up to me. She wanted to tell me how she had come to know Jesus through the preaching, caring, and ministry of that church. Time and again, that is more the rule than it is the exception to the rule. I stood and listened to her unending gratitude thinking this was, is, and must always remain the heart of the matter. As Jesus said, "I am the way." He indeed is, and He is not only the one way to God, He is the only way to everything that God wants to do in our lives. He is the only Savior and we proclaim Him with clarity, boldness, and love. He comes and makes a difference.

Let me just reach in and pull one or two more blessings. I am thankful that the economy is showing signs of improvement. I am not just talking about dollars and cents and profit margins shown by some

companies, but the fact that some people who have been off from work now have jobs and things seem to be getting better across our state and our nation. I am certainly not an economist, but I know the sadness and anxiety that comes over a family with no job and no money. Our country has been in the worst economic crisis that the majority of our people have ever experienced. It has certainly caused all of us to evaluate our priorities, to understand the stupidity of debt, and for many to find a new reliance upon God. We need not forget any of those things, but we can be thankful for the blessings that come, as things seem to improve. So many of our people have been hurting and our churches have been struggling, but God has not forsaken us.

Finally, I am thankful that the future is bright. We are not far from the conclusion of 2010, and we will launch into a package of days known as 2011. Here in Mississippi thousands of us will be meeting daily every day before 8 o'clock to Cover Mississippi in Prayer. In every county and in churches in every area, we will be focused on gathering around God's throne and praying for self that God would guide us, for servants who are in leadership and authority, and for souls. We will walk confidently into a New Year knowing that in those days Jesus will still be Lord of all. We will live out those days with the knowledge that whatever unseen and unknown events may come, our wonderful, caring, and powerful God still reigns. Along with so many of you, I am thankful.

The author can be contacted at jfutral@mbcb.org.

MS POSITIONS

LOOXAHOMA BAPTIST CHURCH in Senatobia, MS is currently seeking a part-time youth minister. Send resume to 808 Lyles Rd. Senatobia, MS 38668 or leave message 662-562-8447.

THE MUSIC SEARCH COMMITTEE of First Baptist Coldwater is seeking a part-time Worship Leader. Please send resumes to P.O. Box 347, Coldwater, MS 38618 or fbcoldwater@bellsouth.net.

MAGNOLIA BAPTIST CHURCH in Laurel MS is looking for a Bi Vocational Minister of Music. Please send resume to: Magnolia Baptist Church, 1040 Wansley Rd., Laurel MS 39440

SAND HILL BAPTIST CHURCH, Attala Association is seeking a bi vocational Minister to Students. Send resumes to Sammy Yates 107 Cavalier Drive Kosciusko Ms 39090

HIGHLAND BAPTIST CHURCH in Senatobia MS is seeking a part-time Minister of Students to work with Youth and College age. If interested, please email resume to pastorhbc@bellsouth.net.

STAFF POSITION ENTERPRISE Baptist Church in Enterprise, MS is accepting resumes for a Full-time Minister of Students. Please send resumes to: enterprisebaptist@att.net OR Enterprise Baptist Church C/O Minister of Students Search P.O. Box 186 Enterprise, MS 39330

Come to the Holy Land and Petra

February 7-16, 2011

\$3,299 from Jackson, MS
or Memphis, TN

(plus tips, taxes, and visa fees)
Space is limited so

Call today for your color brochure & DVD.



RickHenson@aol.com 601-829-1360

Dr. Rick Henson, Pastor of Oakdale Baptist Church in Brandon invites you to join Evangelist Gary Bowlin Anniversary trip to Israel. Around the Sea of Galilee, where Moses looked into that ancient Old Testament the Red Sea, and the Dead Jerusalem, ending at the Garden Tomb. You will be inspired on this Christian tour led by a Jewish guide who loves Jesus. Join us for this trip of a lifetime!

Hosted by Evangelist & Mrs. Gary Bowlin

Gary and Norma will host this their 30th trip to Israel. With over three decades hosting Holy Land trips, Gary & Norma assure you a safe & quality pilgrimage as you walk where Jesus walked. Experience counts. Space is limited. Go online or call today.

www.GaryBowlin.com 601-810-0810 or 601-276-7245

CLASSIFIED ADS

STAINED GLASS: NEW WINDOWS and repairs. Hopper Stained Glass, Jackson, 601-502-0202.

STAINED GLASSWORKS, INC., SERVING MS & AL since 1992. Call 800-605-2970

BETSY'S LIL' CABIN - \$250.00 PER week or \$60.00 per night. 601-940-6841 or 601-643-8817.

GATLINBURG CABIN FOR RENT: 2 bd/2ba, full kitchen, great view of National Pk. \$95/night. 832-922-0401 / pdhw4760@att.net

SEBREN'S SIDING, JACKSON, Christian owned. All home improvements, vinyl siding, windows, metal and shingle roofs, patio covers, screen and glass rooms. 601-992-2092, Don & Rita Sebrén, owners.

GET THE BEST RATES ON: Health Insurance and Medicare Supplements. Call 1-800-541-8196 or visit www.TurnerInsuranceOnline.com

CHURCH PEW UPHOLSTERY, FREE estimates. Davis Upholstery, Quitman, Miss., phone 601-776-6617.

JUST FOR THE RECORD



10. Woodland Church, Columbus

10. Woodland Church, Columbus, held a baby dedication service Oct. 3. Shown are Ben and Tara Hurt with their sons Isaac and Ian; Jason and Melanie Counts with their son, Holden; and Heather and Dan Brewer with their daughter, Ally.
11. Richburg Church, Hattiesburg, will be having a hanging of the green service Nov. 28, 6 p.m.
12. Crystal Ridge Church, Louisville, will host Kenny Evans, Christian evangelist and entertainer, Dec. 19, 6 p.m. A love offering will be received.
13. Pelahatchie Church, Pelahatchie, will host Danny Funderburk in concert Nov. 28, 10:30 a.m.
14. Algoma Church, Algoma, will have their 19th annual drive-through Nativity Dec. 10 and 11, 6-9 p.m., featuring five well-known scenes portraying the life of Jesus. Free.
15. The GA's of Calvary Church, Newton, took up an offering at church and sold lemonade at their GA lemonade stand in August. The group raised money for their Christmas in August mission project.

buying supplies for the children's ministry of Finger Lakes Association in New York.



Spiritual warfare almost killed once-haunted Czech Christian

VALASSKE MEZIRICI, Czech Republic (BP) — Petr Cerny (not his real name) thought he was losing his mind. He saw demons — hideous, seething creatures bulging through the walls of his bedroom like something from a horror movie. They were speaking to him, using sign language. "Preserve your life. Kill her. Stab your wife!" they signed.

Cerny, a 43-year-old Czech laborer, didn't understand what was happening, but this mindless, absolute, frantic terror was real. Escape was his only thought. Cerny's wife and son watched in horror as he ran to the balcony of the family's fifth-floor apartment and jumped.

Born in 1959 to a Catholic family in Soviet-controlled Czechoslovakia, Cerny's initial encounter with religion came through his parents, who taught him about God's existence and praying to the Virgin Mary, but their influence was limited by a barrier that isolated Cerny from his family, the church, and society at large: He was born deaf.

"I knew about God since I was a toddler... [but] we never, ever referred to Jesus... Our attention was always toward Mary," Cerny says. His mother would tell Bible stories but wouldn't use sign language. "It was very frustrating, very confusing [for me]."

By the time he reached his 30s, Cerny's Catholic upbringing was barely recognizable. Handsome and charismatic, he was popular within the city's deaf circles, buoyed by a reputation for knowing how to have a "good time."

He drank and gambled heavily. He verbally and physically abused his wife. He spent hours consuming pornography, and when that no longer satisfied his appetite for sex, he turned to adultery.

"I was ridiculously worldly... Even though I was a Catholic, it had no impact on my life... All you had to do was ask forgiveness of sins. [In the meantime] you did what you wanted when you wanted."

Things began to change when Cerny met Mark and Vesta Sauter, Southern Baptist missionaries from Indiana and Texas, respectively. Supported by the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and the Cooperative Program, they'd come to the Czech Republic to start churches among the country's 50,000 deaf and had arranged to speak at the city's deaf community center where Cerny and his friends hung out.

"We'd just come out of communism and all these religions were coming to town... Jehovah's Witnesses and sects. So, I came out of curiosity," Cerny says.

"[The Sauters] told me the most incredible stories... For the first time I saw these Bible stories [in sign language] and they had a real impact on me and I thought, 'This is not a sect. This is not a cult...' and I began to understand who Jesus was, that He'd come to forgive our sins."

As the Sauters' stories drew Cerny deeper into the Gospel, he was rapidly losing the ability to reconcile his behavior with his budding faith. "The sin in my lifestyle just sickened me," Cerny says.

"I thought my way out of hell was just to go to confession, but then I learned that through Jesus, my life could be transformed."

Cerny fell five stories. His body snagged a clothesline just before hitting the ground, slowing his descent and saving his life. Doctors thought he was drunk, drugged, or crazy, but Cerny says he hadn't had any alcohol or drugs. "I was in total shock... I didn't believe anything that I was seeing," he says.

The fall shattered the bones in Cerny's legs. Doctors told him he would never walk again.

"I wanted to die. My life had just ended for me," he says. "I'd gone from a really popular, successful, free-living guy, and then overnight I'm an invalid."

His wife Maia began to talk about the love of God, "and then she loved me with the love of God," Cerny says. "I thought, 'What a fool I've been! I have not loved her. I have not been a husband to her.'"



FRIENDS IN CHRIST — Southern Baptist missionary Mark Sauter (left) reconnects with his friend and former disciple, Petr Cerny, who says God delivered him from a demonic life of sin and betrayal that compelled him to seek out and apologize to the people he had wronged before he found Jesus. (BP photo)

Hopeful he could walk again, the Sauters persuaded Cerny to accompany them to a hospital in Prague where he might receive better care. He eventually underwent five reconstructive surgeries to repair his legs and endured months of rehabilitation.

During that time, the Sauters and their Czech church-planting partner Anna Smolkova, who also is deaf, took turns caring for Cerny as he recovered.

"I thought, 'These people love me,'" Cerny says. "They were believers, true believers so unlike anything I'd seen, and so unlike the Catholics that were in my life... They became family to me and they emulated what the Scriptures say a Christian is."

"It wasn't just a religion these people practiced, going to church, making confession, and praying. I saw light in them. They worked on my behalf."

Nearly three years after jumping from the balcony, Cerny finally gave his life to Jesus. He was still on crutches, learning how walk again, the day he was baptized.

"My life was different. I'm telling you, totally, totally different... I was in

awe of life. Everything looked so real to me, unlike anything I'd seen... It was like everything I experienced, everything I did felt right... Even the words that fell from my hands [through sign language] were different and beautiful."

The most powerful evidence of Cerny's relationship with Jesus was how his relationship with Maria changed. "He never cared about what made me happy," Maria says, "and suddenly what made me happy was important... He became a helpmate and a partner."

Maria continues, "There's not a day that goes by [that he doesn't ask for forgiveness]... People look at me and say, 'You're out of your mind. Your husband is just gross [because of his past]... You are so gullible. Why are you staying with him?' but for me, there's peace."

"Before I became a Christian," Cerny says, "I thought I had a plain Jane but now my wife is the most beautiful woman on earth... I go to bed every night and think, Thank you, God, that I did not continue in that lifestyle... When my life changed, I could see my wife for who she really was."



Maria Cerny

JUST FOR THE RECORD



2. Johnson ordination



3. Barron



4. Going recognition



5. Moore ordination



1. First Church, Terry, exceeded its Margaret Lackey Offering for State Missions goal of \$2500 by collecting \$2822.

2. Centerville Church, Carroll County, ordained Gerald Johnson as deacon Oct. 17. Shown are William Barrentine, Jr., Johnson, and pastor Gary Moore.

3. Mt. Creek Church, Florence, recently recognized Belle Barron for teaching Sunday School since the mid-1940's. She has taught Primaries, Sunbeams, Young Adults, and is currently teaching the Naomi-Lydia class.

4. First Church, Byhalia, recognized J.B. Going for his service as deacon for 53 years and church treasurer for 49 years. He received a plaque and he and his wife were taken to lunch. Shown are Mike Hamblin, Jim Story, Bill Dawson, Going, George Bristow, Russ McClure, Larry Hearn, and Mike Everett.

5. Fellowship Church, Starkville, recently ordained John C. Moore as deacon. Shown are Odie McHann, Moore, and pastor Dickie Bryan.

6. Midway Church, Jackson, ordained Carl Widdig as deacon Oct. 24. Shown, seated, are Widdig and his wife Eleanor; standing, Bert McLaurin, Anthony Kay, pastor Michael Hunt, Robert Wall, and Talmadge Baughn.

7. The RA's from Newhebron Church, Newhebron, attended a Mississippi College football game Oct. 30. Shown are Barry McCool, Hayden Groover, Cole Groover, Jack Chavis, Wyatt Lott, Eli Riley, Trustin Henderson, and Mike Cooper.

8. Midway Church, Newton, had their third roadside cleanup Oct. 2, picking up 440 pounds of garbage. Shown are the participants.

9. The youth of Fellowship Church, Ellisville, took part in Veteran's Day services, honoring military men and women by collecting boxes to be shipped to soldiers for Christmas. Shown are the participants.



6. Widdig ordination



7. Newhebron Church, Newhebron



8. Midway Church, Newton



9. Fellowship Church, Ellisville

Students taking up cause of imprisoned Christian

GILBERT, Ariz. (BP) — Students at a middle school in Arizona have been praying for two years for the release of Shi Weihan, a Chinese Christian imprisoned in his home country for distributing literature about Jesus.

Jerome Redding, a seventh- and eighth-grade Bible teacher at Gilbert Christian Middle School in Gilbert, Az., received an e-mail a couple of years ago informing him of Shi's plight as a persecuted believer in China. He led his students to begin interceding for Brother Shi, as they call him, and they have continued to do so, especially as the day of his scheduled release draws near.

Shi, a Chinese bookstore owner, was arrested in November 2007 after his Holy Spirit Trading Co. printed Bibles and other Christian materials that were not approved by the Chinese government. Shi did not necessarily need permission from the government, though, because he was giving away the materials rather than selling them.

In January 2008, Shi was released due to insufficient evidence but was arrested again two months later and held with virtually no communication with his family or attorney.

For most of his time in jail, Shi, 39, was held without charges, contrary to Chinese law. He was sentenced in June 2009 to three years in prison and a fine of nearly \$22,000, presumably for "illegal business practices." The time he had already spent in jail would count toward his sentence.

At that time, supporters surmised that he would be released in November 2010, three years after his original arrest. With the arrival of November and no word of his release, ChinaAid told Baptist Press Shi now is expected to be set free in February.

The founder of the first Christian private school in Beijing told ChinaAid that Shi's wife, Zhang Jing, reported Shi is "doing fine and will be released in the coming February."

An anonymous source told Baptist Press the discrepancy between a November release date and a February date stems from the period of time Shi was set free between his first and second arrests. Shi must remain in prison to account for the time he was temporarily released, the source said.

About 90 middle school students this year and about 160 middle and high school students last year at the Christian school have prayed for Shi.



JAILED CHRISTIAN — Shi Weihan (left), a Christian bookstore owner, is being held in a Chinese prison for distributing Christian literature while his wife Zhang Jing (right) and students at a middle school in Arizona pray for his release. (BP photo)

COLLEGE NEWS



2. Harris and Feese

1. The Mississippi College's (MC) Department of Communications is presenting The Best Christmas Pageant Ever at Swor Auditorium. Showtimes are 10 a.m. Dec. 1, 2, 3 plus 7:30 p.m. Dec. 2. Performances are 2 p.m. Dec. 4 - 5. Tickets, \$7 general admission; \$5, students, senior citizens, and MC faculty and staff; and \$4 groups of 30 or more. For reservations, call (601) 925-3935.

2. William Carey University's (WCU) associate professor of biology Randall Harris and Purvis chemistry major Berquin Feese are among 68 outstanding faculty and students from 34 Mississippi public and private universities and colleges to receive special recognition from the

Mississippi Legislature during the Higher Education Appreciation Day - Working for Academic Excellence (HEADWAE) program. Shown are Harris and Feese.

3. Lisa Cummings, assistant professor of psychology on the WCU Tradition campus, was named as the Clinical Mental Health Counselor of the Year at the Mississippi Counseling Association 60th Annual Conference Awards Luncheon held on November 4 in Jackson. The Mississippi Counselor Association is composed of credentialed, professional counselors who work to promote positive development and adjustments among the children and

adults whom they serve.

4. WCU will host a campus-wide Christmas dinner at 4:45 p.m. in Wilkes Dining Hall on Thursday, December 2. The annual "Christmas Vespers and Hanging of the Green" service will follow at 6 p.m. in Smith Auditorium in the Thomas Fine Arts Center. Free.

5. Mark Green, physician and author of *A Night with Saddam*, will be the guest speaker for WCU's Christian Leadership Lecture at 9:25 a.m. on December 15, in Smith Auditorium of Thomas Fine Arts Center. Green is the president and CEO of MD-Partners, an emergency department management and staffing company in Nashville, Tenn. Green's book gives an account of his experience in meeting with one of the greatest tyrants of our age and dictator of Iraq. As a special operations flight surgeon, Green stayed with Hussein on the night of his capture where he spent five hours in conversation with him. The public is invited to attend. For more information, call Barbara Hamilton at (601) 318-6524.

6. Each year, the Mississippi Humanities Council presents the Humanities Teacher Award to one faculty member at each higher learning institution in



7. WCU BSU missions banquet

the state. Milton Wheeler, a professor of history, will receive the 2010 Mississippi Humanities Teacher of the Year for WCU. He was chosen based on his outstanding scholarship, accomplishments and contributions to WCU.

7. WCU's Baptist Student Union (BSU) held its 2nd Annual Missions Banquet on November 15 at 4:30 - 6 p.m. in the Student Conference Center on the Hattiesburg Campus. BSU has set a goal to raise \$10,000 to help support WCU students going on mission trips during the 2010-2011 academic year. The evening included a steak and potato dinner, speakers, and a silent auction. Jess Jennings, an International Mission Board (IMB) missionary to the Philippines, was the key speaker, and several students shared testimonials about former mission trips. Shown are Barbara Hamilton, executive assistant to the presi-

dent; Tim Glaze, director of BSU and assistant professor of religion; Josh Weaver, BSU president; Jess Jennings, IMB missionary to the Philippines; and Leah Urruchi, interim assistant BSU director.

8. Christmas memories will be made again at MC's Festival of Lights. The festival of holiday season music marks its 25th anniversary with performances set for December 2-4 at MC's historic Provine Chapel. The MC Singers will headline the program with help from a 70-member reunion choir from past years during the first performance on Dec. 3. Tickets cost \$15 for adults and \$5 students and are now on sale at the Department of Music in Aven Hall. Each performance will begin at 7:30 p.m. For additional information or to purchase tickets, call Dottie Serio at the Music Department at (601) 925-3440.

The Family of Billy and Margaret Barron would like to congratulate them on their 50th Wedding Anniversary. Billy and Margaret were married on December 3, 1960 in Trenton, GA. They are the parents of two children; Adrian Barron and wife Brenda of Lawrenceville, Georgia, Alisa Drake and husband David of Pearl, Mississippi. They have three grandchildren and one great-grandchild. They have celebrated their lives in serving our Lord and Savior as missionaries and in their present role of pastoring Ebenezer Baptist Church in Ebenezer, Mississippi. The couple will celebrate the occasion with family and friends on December 4, 2010 at a reception held at the Holmes County Baptist Association building in Lexington, Mississippi. We love you both. Happy Anniversary!

Pakistani Christian mother facing death sentence

SHEIKHUPURA, Pakistan (BP) — Ashiq Masih, with his stooped posture, frail body, and dull yellow eyes, stands in a small compartment in Pakistan's Sheikhupura District Jail with his three daughters — Sidra, Eesha, and Eeshum. The girls are weeping silently.

On the other side of a metal grille is Asia Noreen, a Christian and the birth mother of two of the girls and the first woman in Pakistan to receive the death sentence for allegedly blaspheming Islam's prophet Muhammad. Eeshum, age 12 and mentally disabled, whines like a baby for her mother, asking her when she will be back.

"I will be back," she says to her daughters, as they feel their mother's fingers through the gaps in the jail's grille. "Don't you worry, now." Tears run down her face, too.

Arrested on June 19, 2009, Asia (alternatively spelled Aaysa) Noreen was accused of blaspheming Muhammad and defaming Islam. A judge under pressure from area Islamists convicted her under Pakistan's widely condemned blasphemy statutes on Nov. 8.

"I don't know why; when I walked into court that day, I just knew," she said, tears returning to her eyes and her voice shaking, "and when the judge announced my death sentence, I broke down crying and screaming. In the entire year that I have spent in this jail I have not been asked even once for my statement in court, not by the lawyers and not by the judge."

"After this, I have lost hope in any kind of justice being given to me."

In an interview with Compass Direct News at the jail northwest of Lahore in Pakistan's Punjab Province, Noreen said the triggering incident resulted from a "planned conspiracy" to "teach her a lesson," as people in her village about 75 kilometers (47 miles) from Lahore resented her and her family because of a few mishaps.

"What my village people have accused me of is a complete lie," Noreen said. "I had previously had a row over a trivial issue of water running out of my house onto the street, and a man called Tufail verbally abused me. On June 14, when I was out picking *falsas* [a type of berry] with about 30 women, they again asked me to convert to Islam."

Noreen said the women of the village frequently asked her to renounce Christianity while they worked in the fields, and that she

refused each time. "This time, too, I said that I saw no reason why I should leave my own religion," she said. "They then asked me about Jesus Christ, and I told them to go and ask the local mullah and not to bother me with those questions."

Noreen said one of the women asked her for water. After she had fetched it, she said the others told the woman not to drink water brought by an "untouchable" and "dirty woman."

"I asked them if Christians were not human... why the discrimination?" she said. "This annoyed them, and they started verbally abusing me. We were soon engaged in a heated argument."

She said that five days later, a mob led by Qari [one who has memorized the Quran] Muhammad Saalim burst upon her after some of the women told him about the incident in the fields. The mob pressured her to admit that she had blasphemed.

"They have been saying that I confessed to my crime," Noreen said, "but the fact is that I said I was sorry for any word that I may have said during the argument that may have hurt their feelings."

Police arrived as they were beating Noreen and took her into custody, where they registered a case under Section 295-C of the blasphemy laws against her based on the complaint of the imam. "They [police] registered a false complaint," Noreen said, "because the complainant [Saalim] was never present at the scene."

Noreen said she has been heartbroken and shattered since the conviction. Her husband immediately tried to console her. "Everything will be just fine, you just have to stay steadfast in your faith," Masih told her. "All of us are here beside you. Everyone is praying for you."

His words seemed to give her some hope, but she turned and asked Compass a question that no one has been able to answer for her. "How can an innocent person be accused, have a case in court after a false FIR [First Information Report], and then be given the death sentence, without even once taking into consideration what he or she has to say?"

A pastor from Sharing Life Ministry who has been ministering to Noreen during her confinement and was present at all hearings told Compass that the judge had retired to his chambers three times before announcing the verdict.

"He was visibly tense," the pastor said. "The presence of



PRECIOUS TIME — Asia Noreen (center), who has been sentenced to death for allegedly blaspheming Islam's prophet Muhammad, spends a few moments with two daughters after one of her court hearings on charges that she blasphemed Islam's prophet Muhammad. (BP photo)

a mob outside the courtroom was instrumental in the delivery of this harsh verdict."

Sidra, about 15 years old and one of three children born to Masih from a previous marriage, indicated she was traumatized by the attack on her stepmother.

"I saw that mob burst upon my mother, slap her, and beat her up," Sidra said, her eyes both sad and fearful. "I saw them push her hard against a wall and tear her clothes. They were abusing her. I went to free her from their grip, and I heard them say to my mother, 'Admit that you said derogatory things about prophet Muhammad, and we will leave you alone.' Why would my mother ever do anything like that?"

Noreen broke in, "Why was an FIR filed against me by Qari Saalim? Who is he? He doesn't even know what I said or did."

Noreen's lawyers filed an appeal against the district court's verdict in the Lahore High Court on Nov. 12, and the court is likely to take up the case soon.

Sidra said Muslim villagers have bullied her and others in the family. She said a man who has two children of his own beat Eesha, Sidra's 12-year-old stepsister.

Noreen said police have not harmed her, unusual for Pakistani suspects in blasphemy cases. "I was never even mentally harassed by the police," she said, adding that fellow inmates also were treating her well.

Sohail Johnson of the Sharing Life Ministry, which has been following the case from the outset, said authorities may have been aware that the sensitive nature of the case would instantly bring it into public light.

Noreen said she has not lost faith in Jesus. "He will rescue me from this fake case and I

will return home. Please ask everyone to pray for me," Noreen said as two prison guards arrived in the barrack to escort her back to her cell.

In spite of international attention, there has been little response from the government of Pakistan or civil society. No local organization has planned demonstrations to protest the verdict, which could set a dangerous precedent.

Shahbaz Bhatti, federal minister for minorities and a Christian, has written to the Punjab province government requesting protection for Noreen and her family, both inside and outside jail. During the visit to the area, however, Compass observed no special security measures for her family.

Editor's note: Compass Direct News, based in Santa Ana, Ca., provides reports on Christians worldwide who are persecuted for their faith. The group is not affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

REVIVALS AND HOMECOMINGS

1. Cedar View Church, Olive Branch: Revival, Nov. 28 – Dec. 1; Sun., 10:30 a.m., followed by potluck lunch and 6 p.m.; Mon. – Wed., 7 p.m.; Bob Pittman, speaker.

CD or IRA Maturing?

Learn about a safe investment that beats low bank rates & avoid probate

Ask us about 7.5% Guaranteed Income Growth Rider

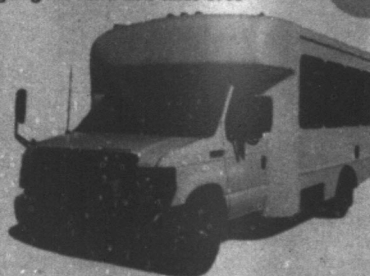
O'Mire Financial

1-800-844-3254

406 B Orchard Park Dr.
Ridgeland, MS 39157

Carpenter BUS SALES

going the extra mile since 1953



Visit www.carpenterbus.com to see over 100 New & Used Buses in Stock. We buy buses and welcome Trade-Ins.

Call Toll Free: 800.370.6180

We Rent Buses!
15 to 41 Passenger
Buses Available
Call Leann for Rates

LifeWay
CHURCH BUS SALES
Biblical Solutions for Life
A Division of LifeWay Christian Resources

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

The Case for the Christian Life: Life Worth Sharing

Romans 1:14-17; 9:1-3; 10:1,14-15; 15:17-20

By Rick Henson

In a world of multiculturalism and tolerance, why should a Christian share his or her faith with anyone? Do we have the right to force our beliefs on others? Logically we answer "No," though Scripturally, we not only have the right, but are instructed to do just that. Jesus commanded in Mark 16:15, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," (KJV). In Acts 1:8 Jesus said, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth," (KJV).

Jesus Himself commanded that we share the gospel with all people, even though He knew that in the 21st Century,

sharing faith would be unpopular and even illegal in parts of the world.

It was also illegal in the 1st Century. The gospel, however, is not some statement of beliefs to which to adhere, nor is it a creed by which to live. According to Romans 1:16, "it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek," (KJV).

The gospel, or *euangelion* in the Greek, from which the word evangelism is derived, means good news, or glad tidings. The saving power of Christ for lost sinners is truly good news. That we do not have to try to save ourselves is liberating news.

The good news of God changes lives, but your words of persuasion do not. If you could talk people into heaven,



Henson

the devil could talk them out of it. The good news is that the good news of the Gospel does not depend on your choice of words, but upon the Word of God. Since every person alive needs the good news of Christ, share God's Word with your personal testimony.

Neither can be refuted. People may refuse to believe, but they cannot refute your experience with Christ, nor the enduring Word of God. Isaiah 40:8 reads, "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever," (KJV). God said it. That settles it, whether you believe it or not.

Note that Paul said the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. God's Word changes lives and saves souls. Share God's Word and your testimony with lost people and see what God can do. A simple mnemonic tool to remember the gospel is A-B-C, or Admit, Believe, and Confess.

Admit to God that you are a sinner and admit that you can-

not save yourself, Romans 3:23 and Ephesians 2:8-9. Believe that Jesus died on the cross and believe that He arose from the dead, Romans 5:8 and Romans 1:4. Confess Him as your Lord, Romans 10:9; Commit your life to Him: Luke 9:23; Call on Him to save you, Romans 10:13 and John 1:12, and Confess Him before men, Matthew 10:32-33.

While you may think you are respecting someone's privacy by not talking to them about Jesus, you actually are refusing to share what they need the very most—salvation. Imagine that co-worker or relative ten minutes after their death. Would they have thought it an intrusion if you had shared Christ with them then?

We must not become complacent about our responsibilities in sharing the gospel. All people need the Lord Jesus. Without Christ, they are headed for hell and eternal punishment created for Satan and demons. Jesus died for the souls of people with whom you work, play, live, and see every day. Tell them the good news.

I'll just live my life in such a way that they will see Jesus in me, you may say. The problem is that you are just not good enough to point anyone to Christ. Many lost people are as moral as Christians. Remember that we are all sinners who need a Savior, including Christians. The Bible states clearly that salvation comes by hearing and believing the gospel. We must tell the good news. Remember that Jesus commanded that we preach the gospel to all creatures everywhere.

Christians are to pray for the salvation of the lost and share Christ with them in God's power to the best of their abilities. If the gospel is worth sharing, and people without Christ are lost and headed for hell, then we must be intentional in sharing the gospel with the lost. We have our marching orders. Let's get to it. In Romans 1:16 Paul wrote, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," (KJV). Are you?

Henson is pastor of Oakdale Church, Brandon.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Being Prepared

Ephesians 6:10-24

By Melleen Moore

In closing the Ephesians' letter, the believer is admonished to rely on the Lord in preparation for standing firm in spiritual warfare. The term 'spiritual warfare' sounds like an oxymoron in that the two words do not seem to belong together. Spiritual brings thoughts of peace, love and forgiveness while warfare brings to mind fighting, hate, and death. However, it is a fact that Satan is alive and well posing evil, danger and temptation on a daily basis. Paul chooses to use military preparation as his example since his audience of readers would be familiar with the terms and equipment used. After all, he is chained to a Roman soldier as he warns the believers of the tactics of Satan.

Get Stronger
Ephesians 6:10-13

The word 'finally' leads us to consider all that has been written in this letter acknowledging God is sufficient. Paul's first instruction is "be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength" (Ephesians 6:10, HCSB). 'Be strengthened' is in the present tense, therefore noting a continuing process to remain prepared in the strength to withstand daily encounters. The phrase 'in the Lord' is a reminder that the believer cannot strengthen himself but must trust in the greater power of the Lord. The spiritual warfare is not against 'man', 'flesh and blood' (Ephesians 6:12, HCSB) but against evil—a demonic group that, with Satan, attacks believers. The second instruction is to "take up the full armor



Moore

of God" (Ephesians 6:13, HCSB) so the believer will be able to resist and to take a stand against Satan and his angels.

Stand Firm
Ephesians 6:14-17

Paul pictures the military armor of a soldier in a spiritual context of the believer. By faith we accept and put on the armor as well and take up the weapons to stand firm. The armor has to be worn to protect us not omitting any part of it. There are six pieces of armor mentioned, three of which are to be worn continuously—belt/truth, chest cover/righteousness and sandals/gospel of peace. The other three pieces of armor are kept close at hand for when the fighting begins—shield/faith, helmet/salvation and sword/God's Word. Let's get a closer look at each piece of the armor. Truth is worn as a belt that will defeat Satan every time, an integrating force in the victorious Christian. Righteousness

is armor of metal that covers the chest front and back from the neck to the waist fortifying against the tactics of Satan. The gospel of peace is sandals with hobnails in the soles for sure footing bringing peace with God and others which allows the believer to withstand the Devil. Faith is a shield that blocks the fiery darts of Satan. In military terms, it is a 4'X2' piece of wood covered in leather. For the believer, it is living faith that trusts in God to fight Satan and his message. Salvation is the helmet that protects the mind—controlled by God. As stated in 2 Peter 3:18 "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (HCSB). The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God that is sharp and can pierce the inner heart of man with God's truth. Satan can be defeated by the living Word of God.

Pray Always
Ephesians 6:18-20

Paul's instruction for praying takes many forms—all times, in the Spirit, alert with

perseverance, and interceding. The focus is that prayer and request are ongoing. The believer is not to neglect the responsibility or the opportunity to pray. Praying in the Spirit is to pray in the will of God for He sees and knows the needs of our prayers before being uttered. Paul also desires prayers for himself that the words of his mouth will be bold and make known the gospel to man. Even though Paul is in chains, it is his desire to speak boldly for Jesus Christ.

Be Encouraged
Ephesians 6:21-24

As the letter comes to close, Paul's concern is for the believers and his desire is to encourage them. He is sending a friend that will tell 'everything' about him and his ministry. Peace, love and grace are the blessings Paul sends to those "who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 6:24, HCSB).

Moore is a member of Macedonia Church, Petal.

Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

THE BAPTIST
Record

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if

submitted as a JPEG file via either (a) e-mail, (b) three-and-a-half inch floppy disk, or (c) CD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items are generally not publishable. Photographs can not be returned. Please do not attach photos with tape or staples.

All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis.

Submit news and photographs to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

Struggling Nepal, Bhutan refugees see light of Gospel

BALTIMORE (BP) — Gray skies and steady rain outside did not dampen the spirits of those who came to the Sunday service and fifth annual medical block party for the community surrounding the Nepal and Bhutan Baptist churches in Baltimore.

Inside, pews were filled with worshippers clothed in colorful ethnic dress who celebrated as some 30 men and women made professions of faith during the joint service.

An excited Samuel Cho, 72, pastor of both The Nepal Baptist Church of Baltimore and The Bhutan Baptist Church, welcomed the diverse congregation of 170, a mixture mostly of Nepali and Bhutanese as well as some Korean, Filipino, Indian, white and African Americans. The First Secretary for the Nepali Ambassador for the United States, Ananda Sharma, was an honored guest and speaker.

"I'm going to give you one of the best messages of the Bible, because I love you so much," Cho said from the pulpit. The sermon, *You Must Be Born Again*, taken from John 3, is Cho's favorite for inviting people to know Jesus. A North American Mission Board missionary, Cho is no stranger to giving that invitation wherever he goes, wasting no time sharing the Gospel and praying for a harvest.

After worship, the group joined in with about 80 others who had come for the Nepali festival and free medical fair. Volunteers from the church served traditional Nepali food while festival-goers could choose to receive haircuts and clothing, along with blood pressure checks and other tests, dental exams and doctor referrals.

During lunch, Cho presented Nepali language Bibles to those who accepted Christ that morning. Twenty-three-year-old Hari Karki, who had arrived in the United States only 25 days earlier, received a Bible. She beamed and said, "I'm so happy."

Baltimore is home to about 3,000 Nepalis and about 500 Bhutanese refugees. To serve this growing community, the medical fair was launched five years ago by The Nepal Baptist Church of Baltimore along with Global Mission Church, a Southern Baptist church in nearby Silver Spring, Md., which provides medical volunteers for the fair.

In 2005, Cho planted The Nepal Baptist Church, the first Nepali Baptist church in the United States. The medical fair helped introduce the new congregation to the community and allowed the church to provide some much-needed medical service.

In 2008, Baltimore began receiving some of the first wave of Bhutanese refugees coming to the United States. Cho went to the airport to meet some families and invited them for fellowship.

In the next couple of years, he said, the city likely will receive another 500 Bhutanese out of the 60,000 total refugees who eventually will immigrate to the United States from Nepal. In the 1990s, more than 100,000 ethnic Nepalese of Hindu background were evicted from Bhutan. Many have lived in refugee camps in Nepal for the last 18 years. In 2008, they were allowed to immigrate to the United States and other countries.

In Nepal, outside a Bhutanese refugee camp while on a mission trip in 2008 with his wife Young, Cho began reaching the Bhutanese people. Not allowed inside the camp, Cho said he would sit



OPEN WIDE — Young Chul Kim Jung gives a dental screening at the medical block party sponsored by The Nepal Baptist Church of Baltimore. Kim and his wife Jung Hyun Kim, both members of the Global Mission Baptist Church in Silver Spring, Md., volunteered their services for the fair. (BP photo)

under a tree outside and talk and share the Gospel with the refugees one by one.

He said mothers would ask him, "How can we protect our children if we come to America?" They had heard of the high crime rate and of sexual assaults and were fearful and concerned about their daughters, he said.

That summer, 200 people made professions of faith, Cho said. The next year when he returned to the camp, another 500 accepted Christ. As a result, Cho planted three Baptist churches in Nepal with support from The Nepal Baptist Church of Baltimore.

Cho has been busy planting churches ever since he finished seminary in 1999 at the age of 66. When he accepted Christ at age 40, the former accountant said he bargained with God that if He would let him pass the CPA exam and heal him from his debilitating headaches, he would be about the Lord's work.

Little did Cho know how God would use him after accepting his offer. In 1999, Cho first planted a Korean church, begun in an apartment complex in Baltimore County with Global Mission Church, where he served for five years as pastor.

At the time, he and Young frequented a Korean restaurant where they soon met a Nepali waitress and her husband. The Chos became friends with the Hindu couple and led them to Christ. The friendship seemed providential as it sparked an interest for Cho in the Nepali people, though he said "it's hard to explain how the Spirit moves."

Cho also had been reading articles about the Nepali and the plight of the Bhutanese refugees. Cho, who at 15 had to leave his home in Korea for some months during the Korean War, said he could somewhat identify with the refugee life.

Later in 2005, the waitress, Nina Shrestha, helped Cho start the The Nepal Baptist Church by opening her home in an apartment complex in Baltimore County where many Nepali lived for fellowship and Bible study. Sometimes just a few would come and then small groups of 10 or 12 began coming weekly, she said.

"Once I believed in Jesus, I told my friends and family," Shrestha said. "What Jesus sacrificed for us really touched my heart. As a Hindu, there are lots of gods, and we didn't have any god like that."

The church grew and later met in the conference room of the Baltimore Baptist Association, officially forming in 2006. Today, Cho said the church has about 50 members and meets in the chapel of Govans Boundary Methodist Church.

"Right now," Shrestha said, "people are understanding the difference between Hindu[ism] and Christianity, and the church is growing."

In 2008, Cho planted The Bhutan Baptist Church. Small groups first met in homes in the apartment community where the incoming refugees first settle. After Sunday morning worship with The Nepal Baptist Church, the

tireless Cho heads over for an afternoon service at The Bhutan Baptist Church which meets at The Moravia Assembly of God which is within walking distance of its members.

The church has grown to about 70 members and works with the Maryland Food Bank to distribute food to the community.

Cho helps members of the Bhutanese congregation look for work and gives them referrals when he can.

Together both churches are supporting Cho's new free-of-charge Bible school, The International Bible Study of Baltimore, which held its opening session in September at The Nepal Baptist Church.

Cho says his dream is to disciple and educate the Nepali and Bhutanese so some can become missionaries or pastors and spread the Gospel in the United States as well as in their native countries.

Cho said he teaches them, "When you were a refugee you were mistreated, but now you are equal and made in the image of God."

Correction

On page seven of the November 18 issue, Gwen Williams was erroneously identified in a Baptist Press photograph outline as a member of Franklin Avenue Church in New Orleans. She is actually a member of First Church, Picayune. The Baptist Record regrets the error.

Hard soil, tough Christians sowing seeds of ministry

MALI (BP) — It was spring in western Africa and the previous year's meager harvest had been eaten. The crops for that year had not even been planted. For Malians dealing with years of drought, poor crop production and resulting hunger, timing is everything.

International Mission Board (IMB) missionary Steve Roach and wife Susan are working to break this cycle. Steve Roach, as the IMB's strategy coordinator for the Bambara people of Mali, is teaching them a different way of farming, one that will produce enough crops to eliminate starvation.

Roach, an Oklahoma native, first heard about Farming God's Way, a strategic, no-till farming program developed in Zimbabwe, during a visit to South Africa. Started 28 years ago, the program attempts to teach improved farming techniques through church networks. It combines biblical teaching with training in technology and management.

Each year for generations Malians have plowed the rough ground with cattle, tossed seeds unsystematically and burned off fields at the end of harvest. These are the practices Roach has been working to change.

Putting hands and feet to Roach's plan are Sam Jones (not his real name), an IMB journeyman from Crystal Springs, Ms.; the missionary Slim Lanier (not his real name) of Live Oak, Fl.; and Jeremy Toombs, a volunteer from Lawton, Ok.

Previous helpers were Ryan Schelb of Tampa, Fl., a volunteer who stayed for six months at his own expense, and Andy Motley of Columbia, S.C., another volunteer who helped for three months.

The idea behind the no-till farming plan is to keep the soil fertilized and in place, even with torrential rains and, in the

process, share Bible stories teaching Malians the God-given potential of their land.

Because it is tradition to just toss seeds, many are washed away by rain, eaten by birds, or just never grow because of crowding. With the no-till farming model, the farmer digs holes approximately 24 inches apart and six inches deep. Each row is about 30 inches apart.

Manure is placed at the bottom of the hole and covered by a layer of dirt, leaving about three inches. Three seeds are placed into the hole and covered with the remaining dirt. Placing manure in the hole first helps the soil remain fertilized even if the ground is flooded during the rainy season. "Whatever fertilizer you put in... stays there and has enriched the soil that amount for next year," Roach said.

"Any kind of bean adds nitrogen to the soil. Corn or millet, which are the staples here, need nitrogen," he said. "...What the beans add to the soil, the corn takes out. It's kind of a symbiotic relationship."

Last year's lack of rain yielded few results with the new farming method. Unfortunately, the Malians' method produced even less. By February, the villagers were out of food. Their harvest is not until November.

"They [the villagers] greatly resisted the farming method and told us, 'We are farmers and we know how to farm better than you,'" Jones said. "They told us that we were crazy. This was hard to believe because they never produce enough food to eat for a whole year. ...However, the traditions are so strong that they just couldn't admit that there might be a better way to do things than the way their fathers did them."

Beulah Church in Hopkins, S.C., has worked with Roach to come up with alternative methods to help the Malians feed



REACHING OUT — Susan Roach and members of the Songhai missions team speak with a local man in Timbuktu, Mali. So far, the team has successfully planted three churches and started several outreach groups among the Songhai. More than one million Songhai live in West Africa. Though most profess allegiance to Allah, demonic worship and possession are common among this people group. (BP photo)

themselves. The church, which sends mission teams to Mali every couple of months, initially gave food to the people but this year they decided to try something different.

"I talked to [the villagers] about teaching them to fish instead of giving them a fish," said Brad Bessent, the church's senior pastor, "so we started a farming project with a well-watered garden."

With funds from the Southern Baptist World Hunger Fund and grant money from South Carolina churches and the state convention, there is now a fenced garden area that produces food year-round. In addition, Bessent buys the villagers a bag of grain for every

compost hole they dig — but they must be to his specifications. As of June, Malians had dug 289 holes, although not all met the pastor's requirements.

Roach and the no-till farming group decided to try a new approach as well. The group found a new village in November 2009 and explained they wanted to demonstrate a different way of farming and a better way to compost. The villagers agreed and the group has had great success.

"Because this village is not so gripped by the desperation of hunger, they are more open to new methods," Jones said.

There have been even greater dividends. "In February, three men accepted Christ. Since then,

we've been meeting together weekly with these three men teaching them new stories from God's Word," Jones said.

Lanier, who is leading the men in this latest effort, and Jones have learned that some of the no-till method will just not work in Mali's soil, which is different from Zimbabwe's soil. However, the villagers are curious about the results.

"We will hopefully have a good crop of peanuts and beans," Jones said. "The villagers are taking note of how we planted both of these crops and are seemingly impressed at how they are doing."

"This year our focus has been on the 'main' thing — church planting," Jones added.

Udmurtian people ripe for Gospel message as couples prepare to go

IZHEVSK, Udmurtia (BP) — Charlie and Heather Murphy (not their real names) met Will and Marie Thompson (not their real names) while attending seminary in Texas. The two couples discovered a mutual desire to share God's love with the nations.

Little did they know that God had a plan to send them to engage the same unreached people group in the Republic of Udmurtia, a small country west of Siberia.

Today, the Murphys and Thompsons are Russian language students in Izhevsk, the capital city of Udmurtia. They believe God has called them to show His love to the Udmurts.

The population of Udmurtia is largely Russian. Ethnic Udmurts make up only 30% of its inhabitants. Shy and quiet, Udmurts show themselves to be a warm, vibrant people once trust is built with them. They often are recognized by their distinct physical features, such as small stature, high cheekbones, and a high percentage of redheads.

Udmurts often mix Russian Orthodoxy and pagan worship practices. Fewer than 0.3% are considered evangelical Christians.

Years of social and spiritual oppression have rendered the Udmurts as outcasts. Because of low employment rates, most Udmurts live in

rural villages where they struggle to eke out a meager existence from their family gardens. It is no surprise that a general sense of hopelessness — expressed in depression, alcoholism, and high suicide rates — plagues their culture.

"Without a doubt," Charlie Murphy says, "the thing that burdens me the most about this people is just the depression. You can see it on their faces. They're buying time until they can see what's next. Unfortunately, a lot of the animistic roots still remain in this region. Some turn to the animism, some turn to the Orthodox Church, but right now very few are turning to Christ."

Will Thompson echoes these sentiments. Udmurtia, he says, is "a place ready to receive the Gospel because there's really not as much pride that you have to fight through. Hopelessness is just an open field, open soil for the Gospel."

The two couples pray daily for Udmurts to put their trust in Christ and boldly share their faith in their villages. These prayers are fueled by an earnest love for the people of Udmurtia.

"Why on earth would I love a people that I'd never met?" Marie Thompson reflects. "Why would I want to go live with a people that I hadn't really seen? I think only God can give you a love like that for a people group."



POUNDING PAVEMENT — Russian language students from America and local believers walk the streets of a village in Udmurtia, a small country west of Siberia. God gave the students a heart to reach the Udmurts, also a minority people group in Russia. (BP photo)